

To: The Joint Committee on Children

From: Kristen Keska

Re: Support of the Immediate Passage of SB929

This binder Mrs. Bove presents to you today was created yesterday by students who wanted to volunteer their voices, their opinions, and their personal narratives to participate in democracy in a way that I teach daily to my AP Government and Modern United States History classes. Their writings were done during the lunch period, at the end of class, or during their study hall and was completely optional. These students wanted to express how beneficial free food for all was during COVID and that this program should be a permanent feature in all Connecticut schools.

Common themes from EHHS students:

- 1) The value of breakfast and how most ate breakfast at school when it was free and now skip the meal because they lack money in the account or the ability to pay.
- 2) The impact of missing breakfast on their focus during the day and the ripple effects that are felt when students go right to work at the end of the day or are involved in sports and clubs after school.
- 3) The empathy felt for their friends that skip meals because they cannot pay and are too embarrassed or lack the ability to advocate for themselves.
- 4) The relief for families when they know their children are not hungry during the day.
- 5) The financial relief for all economic classes of Connecticut families; working poor, lower middle class, middle class, etc. Each child is the potential savings of \$1,000 or more a year. This is a de facto tax break created to support Connecticut families and keep money to pay for necessary household expenses during this period of extreme inflation.

Removing my educator hat, I know I can afford lunch for my children, but also know that removing the cost of food at school impacts the stigma that my daughter's friends and peers have if they forgot their lunch and do not have money. Feeding all children should be the concern of every American. Making schools places where students feel 100% safe and burdenfree is important. I am concerned about the psychological damage done to students that skip meals because they cannot buy it at school. Hunger at school could be a core memory that will impact a person forever. I know Southington Public Schools has made it clear that students will not be turned away if they lack money in their account, but my own daughter was embarrassed the one day she got a slip saying she owed a few bucks because her account was out of funds. I could only imagine if this situation happened again and again to a student that could not ask their parents to add money to their account because they hear their parents stressed over money issues in the home.

Thank you for listening. This bill is good for all youth in Connecticut.



Kristen Keska

Former Semi-Finalist for CT Teacher of the Year, 2017-2018

VFW State Teacher of the Year, 2018-2019

Teacher at East Hampton High School, 2006-present

Parent of 2 Young Daughters from Southington